

# THE CLEANUP OF BOSTON HARBOR



Photo Courtesy of the Rotarian, 1969



"BEFORE"

Once called the dirtiest harbor in America, Boston Harbor is well on the road to complete recovery.

Until the 1950s, millions of gallons of untreated sewage were discharged into Boston harbor every day, contaminating the water, sediments and fish. Although construction of two primary wastewater treatment plants in 1952 and 1968 improved effluent quality somewhat, these plants proved inadequate to protect the beaches and fisheries of the Harbor. In 1985, the EPA sued the state in federal court to force the construction of a modern wastewater treatment system.

The court ordered the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) to build a multi-billion dollar, state-of-the-art treatment facility for sewage from Boston and 42 surrounding communities. Portions of that facility are now complete. For example, sewage sludge -- which used to be dumped directly into the Harbor -- is now pelletized and used as fertilizer. The old sludge discharge site, once devoid of life, has been recolonized by marine species and the water is noticeably clearer. Better industrial pretreatment has greatly reduced the discharge of toxics into the harbor. Sewer overflows have dropped as the MWRA has upgraded its pumping facilities. Beach closings have been dramatically reduced, and porpoises have returned to the harbor.



"Boston Harbor today"

Further progress is in sight. The remaining portions of the MWRA treatment plant will be completed in 1999. Additional facilities to reduce sewer overflows are in the works. EPA continues to oversee compliance with the court order, to ensure that this historic harbor will once again be a source of pride, rather than shame.

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